

Intercepted Conversations Throw Doubts on Value Of Any Statements by Reds

Washington Move Comes as Macmillan Sets Moscow Talks

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The Eisenhower Administration chose yesterday to introduce a complicating new factor into the cold war which had been showing at last a sign of a thaw.

This factor was the strange, and far from fully explained, case of the American transport carrying 17 airmen, shot down by Soviet fighter planes some 20 or 30 miles over the Turkish border inside Soviet Armenia. The evidence indicates the Russians have been caught in a bald-faced lie about the plane's fate.

The disclosure here came a few hours after London had announced Prime Minister Harold Macmillan would visit Moscow to seek cold war solutions. And the announcement came only after the speeches at the Soviet Communist Party Congress by Premier Nikita Khrushchev and his deputy, Anastas I. Mikoyan. Yesterday was the final day of the Congress.

Could Discredit Mikoyan

The effect of the disclosures could be to discredit Mikoyan whose peace-and-trade talk to American businessmen here last month had caused some alarm at the State Department. In a larger sense, the disclosures tend to discredit the Soviet word on any subject—and the Soviet reputation was none too high in many quarters both here and elsewhere in the free world.

Hence the disclosures could tend to lessen the pressures on the Administration, pressures both from America's allies and from leading Americans in and out of Congress, for offering negotiations in any East-West

Why had there been no disclosure until now of the tape recording of conversation among the Soviet fighter pilots who shot down the plane? American officials have been saying privately for some time they had at least a hope that some of the 11 men unaccounted for might have gotten out of the plane alive. These officials thought it at least possible the airmen were in Soviet hands, subject to harsh interrogation and quite likely to be shot rather than returned home if there was too much public pressure from Washington.

Release of the information yesterday seems to indicate that there is now little hope any are alive. Or else that international political considerations were considered paramount at this time.

As to how the United States obtained the tape recording, there is little mystery. The story came out last summer when two Oxford University students were arrested by the British government.

The two youths had written an article in Isis magazine. The public prosecutor at their trial said that "some of the matter was true" and "of a highly secret nature." The youths were jailed for three months. Their article said in part:

"All along the frontier between East and West, from Iraq to the Baltic, perhaps farther, are monitoring stations manned largely by national servicemen trained in Morse (code) or Russian, avidly recording the least squeak from Russian transmitters—ships, tanks, aeroplanes, troops and control stations."

The two students added that "since the Russians do not always provide the required messages, they are sometimes provoked. A plane 'loses' its way, while behind the frontier tape recorders excitedly read the irritated exchanges of Russian pilots; and, when the latter sometimes force the aeroplane to land, an international incident is created and reported in the usual fashion . . ."

In the current case, of course, the United States has denied that there was any intentional violation of Soviet airspace. In fact it has gone further and, quoting the representation by Under Secretary of State Robert Murphy to the Soviet Ambassador, pointed out "that the operation of the Soviet radio beacons in the area might easily have induced a navigational error on the part of the pilot." Murphy "said that the plane had entered Soviet airspace in error and not intentionally."

Other Incident Noted

There was a time, some years ago, when American planes were flying ultra-high altitude photographic missions over considerable areas of the Soviet Union. In fact, Soviet fighter planes which scrambled to reach them failed to do so. At one point, President Eisenhower personally ordered an end to such intelligence missions. That was at a point of thaw in the cold war.

Likewise Soviet reconnaissance missions are known to have flown over Alaska and perhaps over other parts of the North American continent on similar missions.

Last June 27 another American plane, also unarmed, somehow crossed the Soviet frontier in the same area as in the present case. But the Soviet fighters, instead of shooting it down, forced it to land. The nine crew members were later repatriated.

In a note last Dec. 15 relating to two other cases, in the Sea of Japan and in the Baltic Sea, the Soviet Union warned the United States it would have to take the consequences of such affairs. The note said that "all responsibility and consequences for dangerous flights of American planes near frontiers of the Soviet Union and for violation by them of USSR airspace lie with the United States."

International military custom, if that is the correct word, is that a nation whose airspace is violated by a military plane of another nation has the right to force it down. But the custom does not call for shooting it down.

Riding Wrong Beacon

As to the current incident, the trap sprung on the Soviets in terms of lying obviously seemed worth more than protection of intelligence sources, especially in view of the Oxford students' disclosures.

It may very well be, of course, that the American transport was doing exactly what the Government says it was doing: "participating in a world-wide Air Force project to study the propagation of radio waves transmitted by United States radio stations."

The plane's flight plan was filed with ICAO, the international aviation organization which includes the Soviet Union, officials said. It also turns out that one leg of the projected flight, that closest to the Soviet frontier, is an international airline used by various American and foreign commercial airlines flying from Europe to the Mideast.

It also turns out that the Soviet radio beacon at Batumi, just across the border, uses a frequency almost identical with the Turkish beacon used by the commercial lines as well as by the American plane shot down. Thus it is believed here that the American plane was riding the Soviet beacon by mistake. But no one was able to say yesterday whether ICAO ever had been asked to protest the confusing Soviet frequency or whether any effort had been made to remove the danger of a mistake such as that presumed to have occurred. Notices to American military pilots had been posted to beware of the conflicting Soviet beacons.